

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 9, 1907, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. June 9th, 1907. Dear Mabel:

I find that going early to bed is not conducive of to letter writing but I cannot let Sunday go by without a word to you. Douglas is acting as my amanuensis so I can comfortably smoke my pipe and dictate to you at the same time.

We reached Grand Narrows last Monday the third and came on to Beinn Bhreagh Tuesday morning. We found Miss McCurdy on the wharf at Baddeck, and took possession of her and she has been taking good care of us ever y since. Old Champ met us at Beinn Bhreagh and carried me up the mountain to see the wreck. I am glad to notice that a considerable amount of material can be used in the re-erection of the tower I drove to the Laboratory to see the new motor which seems to be a beauty — a regular spit fire. We have not been able to use the motor yet, as it shows some cranknees of disposition which would be most unfortunate in a flying machine motor. It has been installed on the Ugly Duckling for purposes of study but so far we have not been successful in driving two propellers with it. It seems to have plenty of power but the power is not developed fully unless when running at full speed and when the two propellers are connected the resistance to rotation is so great that the engine is slowed down thus loosing power or the belts slip while the engine gallops, thus causing the propellers to lose power while the engine works well. The utilization of two propellers with one engine is a 2 problem indeed. I am not satisfied with any of the means so far tried to transmit power from one engine to two propellers. While in Washington I studied the plan adopted in Langley's aerodrome but must confess that I do not like it either. I am gradually coming to the conclusion that we will get better results by a direct drive than by transmitting the power through belts of

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gearing. But this means either two destinal engines with two propellers or a single engine with a single propeller. Theoretically a single propeller will not do, for the tendency is for the propeller to rotate one way and the machine itself to rotate the other which would be rather awkward for the would be aviator. We have now fitted the motor with a single propeller on the Ugly Duckling to see what speed is developed. We tried it yesterday but the propeller turned out to be too near the water and it was smashed the moment head way was gained. We will try a smaller propeller tomorrow and then raise the engine higher so as to use a propeller of the same diameter employed in last year's experiments.

I have been looking over the numbers of L'aerophile I find waiting for me here. Details are given of the successful experiments of Santos Dumont and two other experiments in France and so far as I can understand they all of them employ a single propeller — which is rather a surprise to me. If a single propeller will do the problem is very such simplified. I am unwilling to try two engines on the 3 same machine on account of the double load.

I am trying to make a new disposition of my time. It would be a great thing for all of us I think if I could manage to go to bed in decent time and get up in the morning like other people. The only question is whether I can think and study as well in the day time as I do at night if special arrangements are made for quiet undisturbed time. I always feel brightest and best after seven hours in bed. If I lie in bed longer than that I feel lazy and stupid. This means that, should I be in bed by midnight I should not sleep much after seven o'clock.

The new plan adopted has worked so far very well. I have been in bed by twelve every night since I came here (excepting last night which was Saturday for I felt I could indulge myself in the morning on Sunday.)

Every morning Maggie brought up my breakfast to my bedroom at half past seven. There was no difficulty in my waking up. After eating my breakfast I got up, took my usual exercise, (1,2,3,4,5,6 and etc., 10) and proceeded into the study for a pipe and quiet read. About a quarter before nine I dressed and was ready for Mr. McInnis when he called

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at nine o'clock. We then proceeded to inspect the estate together. On Wednesday morning we went up Bras D'Or Avenue to the top of the mountain making notes of the condition of the roads — dead trees and rubbish to be removed and etc., etc., coming back to the house by ten o'clock. I 4 then retreated to the study to read quietly after my drive and a notice was placed out in the hall requesting all persons from passing by between the hours of 10 to 12. Miss McCurdy helped me by abstaining from going to her bedroom in the tower room; and Maggie helped me by abstaining from going up to the attic and the whole house was quiet, in the neighborhood of my study. From the experience of the past week, I am inclined to think that I may be able to keep this plan up with a little encouragement from you and others.

Douglas and Baldwin have been helping too. They also have been in bed before twelve and have had their breakfasts at half past seven. Maggie has been prompt to the minute with meals and we have all of us — so far — been equally on time. Douglas has gone down to the dark room in the forenoon and at twelve o'clock he has started for the Point with Champ. At a quarter past twelve to the minute lunch has been on the table and at a quarter before one I have started for the kite house for my Laboratory work.

Dinner at seven has been equally prompt, and we all leave for upstairs about eleven o'clock and are in bed by twelve.

Of course "New brooms sweep clean" and there is no assurance that we can keep this up. We found no difficulty — or at least little difficulty — this first week. I think, however, that we should make the attempt. If we are successful I am sure it will add very materially to your comfort and 5 happiness as well as our own. So please don't throw cold water on our plans but encourage us as much as possible to make the attempt.

Every day I have devoted the hour of nine to ten to an inspection of the place with Mr. McInnis. I have examined the barn and the outhouses and have been all over this house making notes with McInnis. Tomorrow we take up Beinn Bhreagh Nursery and if we

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succeed in continuous inspection of the kind I will take a new interest in the property here — an interest which I can share with you — and the place will be looked after as it never has been before. Hitherto it has just “grewed” as Topsy did. Beginning at the top if I poke up Mr. McInnis he will polk up the men under him — and things will be done. The only trouble so far relates to letter writing. However, I disposed of two important letters today, one to Prof. E. A. Fay and the other to Mr. North, the director of the Census. This is my third attempt and I am seriously considering whether it would not be just as well to abandon typewriting excepting for business communications and use dictated handwriting instead. These letters have gone so easily and the handwriting is so clear and legible that I feel sure that it will do for ordinary correspondence leaving typewriting for business and for dictated notes or papers.

A letter has arrived here for Lieut. Selfridge so I presume he may be here any day.

Your loving husband, Alec.